

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 107018  
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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0000

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 107018

FOLLOWING REPEAT ABU DHABI 1231 ACTION SECSTATE INFO DOHA  
JIDDA KUWAIT APR 27.

QUOTE C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 1231

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, ET

SUBJ: ERITREANS REQUEST FOR DIALOGUE

1. EMBASSY RECEIVED PHONE CALL APRIL 25 FROM MR. OSMAN SALEH SABBE CLAIMING TO BE REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREAN LIBERATION GROUP AND ASKING TO SEE AMBASSADOR. WE RESPONDED THAT AMBASSADOR WAS OUT OF TOWN (WHICH WAS TRUE) BUT THAT HE WOULD BE BACK APRIL 26. SABBE STATED THAT HE WOULD BE LEAVING ABU DHABI THAT DATE AND ASKED IF HE COULD SEE ANYONE ELSE. DCM AGREED TO RECEIVE HIM.

2. WHEN SABBE MET WITH DCM HE IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS CHAIRMAN OF CENTRAL COUNCIL OF ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT (PEOPLE LIBERATION FORCES). HE SUBSEQUENTLY EXPLAINED THAT HIS ORGANIZATION WAS ONE OF TWO LAYING CLAIM TO ELF TITLE. HE LABELLED THE PLF WING AS "MODERATE AND NATIONALIST"; OTHER ELF GROUP WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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MIXTURE OF MODERATES AND LEFTISTS; AND THERE WAS THIRD SMALLER GROUP CALLED ERITREAN POPULAR FRONT WHICH DEFINITELY LEFTIST. HE STATED HE WAS IN UAE ON ONE OF FREQUENT VISITS HE MADE IN CONNECTION WITH FINANCIAL SUPPORT WHICH HE STATED UAEG WAS PROVIDING HIS GROUP. (LOCAL GOVERNMENT DAILY CARRIED LONG INTERVIEW WITH SABBE ON APRIL 22.)

3. SABBE CLAIMED TO HAVE HAD CONTACT IN 1975-76 IN BEIRUT WITH ONE "DR. JOSEPH" OF THE AMERICAN EMBASSY. HE STATED THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE FURTHER DIALOGUE WITH USG. HE DESCRIBED IN PREDICTABLE TERMS THREAT POSED BY RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN ADDIS ABABA AND EQUALLY PREDICTABLY ARGUED THAT IT WOULD BE IN WESTERN INTERESTS IF HIS GROUP TRIUMPHED IN ERITREA. IF NOTHING ELSE THIS WOULD CUT ETHIOPIA OFF FROM RED SEA, SUBSTANTIALLY REDUCING IMPACT OF ANY SOVIET INFLUENCE WHICH MIGHT BE ACHIEVED THERE. MOREOVER, SABBE POINTED TO VARIETY OF TIES HIS GROUP HAD WITH OTHERS IN AREA, ALL OF WHICH COULD CONTRIBUTE TO WESTERN INTERESTS THERE. ON ONE HAND, YLF/PLF WAS GETTING SUPPORT FROM THOSE SUCH AS SUDAN AND OIL RICH ARAB STATES WHICH WERE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT POTENTIAL SOVIET INFLUENCE IN RED SEA AREA. HIS GROUP WAS ALSO TIED TO ETHIOPIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION (EDU) WHICH IN ARMED OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT IN ADDIS ABABA (HE CLAIMED EDU HOLDS THREE ETHIOPIAN TOWNS NEAR SUDANESE BORDER) AND WHICH HE CLAIMED REALLY REPRESENTS ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE AND FORCES OF MODERATION. FINALLY ELF/PLF HAD CLOSE TIES TO SOMALIA, WHICH SABBE NOTED WAS ALSO MUCH CONCERNED WITH EVENTS IN ETHIOPIA AND SOVIET ACTIONS THERE. SABBE OBSERVED THAT HIS GROUP COULD CONTRIBUTE TO CLOSER TIES BETWEEN SOMALIA AND US WHICH HE UNDERSTOOD WASHINGTON WAS SEEKING. IN SHORT, THERE WERE GROUPING OF FORCES IN ARYA INCLUDING HIS ERITREAN FACTION

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WORKING FOR OBJECTIVES BOTH OF INTERESTS OF PEOPLE OF THE AREA AS WELL AS IN INTERESTS OF WEST.

4. IN TERMS OF WHAT HE HOPED TO ACHIEVE FROM DIALOGUE WITH USG, SABBE WAS SOMEWHAT VAGUE. ON ONE HAND, HE ARGUED THAT SIMPLY HAVING US UNDERSTANDING, EVEN WITHOUT DIRECT INVOLVEMENT COULD HELP A LOT. ON OTHER HAND, HE SPOKE OF NEED FOR JOINT PLAN OF ACTION IN THE AREA AND OF POSSIBLY HELPING UDU OVERTHROW PRESENT ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT IN NEXT SIX MONTHS BEFORE RUSSIAN INFLUENCE BECAME MORE ENTRENCHED. (SABBE ALSO MENTIONED CUBA AND STATED THAT HIS FORCES BELIEVED THERE WERE CUBAN PILOTS FLYING ETHIOPIAN PLANES AGAINST THEM). IN SHORT, IMPRESSION WAS THAT HE WOULD TAKE ALMOST ANY DEGREE OF SUPPORT HE COULD GET. FIRST STEP WAS TO DISCUSS SITUATION AS IT EXISTED. SABBE STATED HE PREPARED TO HOLD SUCH DISCUSSIONS ANYWHERE, INCLUDING WASHINGTON.

5. DIM'S RESPONSE WAS NON-COMMITAL. HE NOTED STRONG DISINCLINATION ON PART OF AMERICAN PEOPLE AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES IN BOTH EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES TO GET INVOLVED IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES. EVENTS IN ETHIOPIA WERE, NATURALLY, MATTER OF CONCERN--HIGHLIGHTED BY RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT THAT NUMBER OF US INSTALLATIONS TO BE CLOSED AND PERSONNEL EXPELLED. BUT CONCERN WAS ONE THING, NATURE OF RESPONSE, IF ANY, WAS ANOTHER. DCM DID UNDERTAKE TO REPORT SABBE'S APPROACH TO WASHINGTON WITHOUT PREDICTING EITHER LIKELIHOOD OR POSSIBLE NATURE OF RESPONSE. SABBE EXPRESSED APPRECIATION. HE PROVIDED CONTACT POINT HERE IN ABU DHABI TO WHICH MESSAGE COULD BE RELAYED. HE ALSO NOTED THAT HE WOULD BE AT GULF HOTEL IN DOHA FOR THREE DAYS AND, AFTER FEW DAYS IN KUWAIT, WOULD BE PROCEEDING TO

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JIDDA. HE SAID HIS GROUP HAD OFFICE IN JIDDA AS WELL (PHONE 32288) HEADED BY OSMAN DANDAN WHOM HE SAID WAS KNOWN TO EMBASSY JIDDA.

6. COMMENT: WE CLEARLY ARE IN NO POSITION TO PASS JUDGEMENT ON MR. SABBE NOR DO WE SEE THIS EMBASSY PLAYING ONGOING ROLE IN THIS AFFAIR. WE WILL OF COURSE PASS ON MESSAGE TO OFFICE HERE IF THAT IS DESIRED, BUT WE ASSUME RESPONSE, IF ANY, BETTER MADE BY THOSE FAR MORE FAMILIAR THAN WE WITH EVENTS IN AND USG POLICY TOWARDS ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA.

DICKMAN

UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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